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SUBJECT: SLM-Abdelshafi's Faith in UN/AU Roadmap Undermined

REF: Khartoum 01092

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Members of the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) Abdelshafi faction were disappointed in the failure of the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue meeting to take place. After being informed by UN/AU officials that the CHD meeting was off, faction members concluded that the UN/AU may have sabotaged it and/or deliberately failed to support what they viewed as a U.S. initiative. The UN/AU was vague in its explanation of where the peace process was headed and short on details of its planned meeting in Arusha on July 23. As a result, Abdelshafi's confidence in the prospects for UN/AU-led negotiations on Darfur is extremely low at this point. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On July 12, Pekka Haavisto, the Senior Advisor to UN Envoy Jan Eliasson, and Sam Ibok, the Head of the African Union's Darfur Peace Implementation office, met with Ahmed Abdelshafi and faction members in Kampala. During the meeting, Haavisto informed them that the CHD meeting planned for Mombasa was off. He cited two factors: the "disappearance" of the Chadian official needed to give permission for the chartered plane to pick up rebel commanders and Kenyan "cold feet" over the purpose of the gathering. As a result, Haavisto continued, the UN/AU would "take over" the CHD initiative and hold a meeting of rebel leaders in Arusha, Tanzania on July 23. The invitees would be Abdullah Yeyia, Ahmed Abdelshafi, Sharif Harir, Khalil Ibrahim, Khamis Abdullah, and Abdelwahid El-Nur. The sole purpose of the meeting, according to Haavisto, would be to discuss the venue of the Darfur negotiations. Abdelshafi suspects that the meeting would be used to make statements about forging common rebel positions. (Note: Per reftel, Eliasson admitted during a July 12 meeting with Special Envoy Natsios that the UN/AU hoped the meeting would result in a common set of rebel positions. End Note.)

¶3. (SBU) Abdelshafi was surprised and puzzled that the UN/AU announced the scuttling of the CHD initiative and then volunteered to take it over. Abakar Abuelbashar, who led the SLM's wealth-sharing negotiations at Abuja, asked the UN/AU officials how negotiations could take place without any discussions among the various SLM factions on a common position. Haavisto and Ibok told them that the convergence phase of the UN/AU roadmap was over and the parties were now in "pre-negotiations". Abdelshafi and other faction members were astonished that no internal meeting of the SLM was on the roadmap, according to Abuelbashar. Haavisto said that the Darfur negotiations would begin on August 25. Abdelshafi asked about the venue. Haavisto asked him for suggestions. Abdelshafi offered Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, or Namibia. Haavisto encouraged them to write letters to those governments with a request to host. (Note: We have heard the UN/AU is planning to hold the talks in Arusha. End Note.)

¶4. (SBU) Nouri Abdullah, an outspoken and extreme member of the faction, told P/E Chief and CHD that to the rebels, it "looked like the UN/AU completely and deliberately undermined the Americans." Abdelshafi also told P/E Chief that he was very concerned about the

future direction of negotiations for the very same reason. He has relied heavily on U.S. advice to participate in the CHD dialogue and expressed his concern that the U.S. was being cut out of the process. During the UN/AU meeting, Ibok tried to reassure Abdelshafi by appealing to his ego and telling him that he was the person to provide the Fur the leadership it needed. The endorsement was flattering, according to other faction members, but did not give Abdelshafi any clear sense of where a process without SLM unity could go. As far as Abdelshafi was concerned, the UN/AU plan was headed the same direction as the Abuja talks, relying on individuals to deliver without having a mandate from their constituencies.

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COMMENT
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¶5. (SBU) Abdelshafi had worked hard to prepare for the CHD dialogue, including clarifying his vision and concrete steps SLM needs to take in the future. He had looked forward to the Mombasa meeting as an opportunity to meet with other SLM leaders without the interference of outside actors. He and others in his faction believe that without this basic foundation, negotiations are doomed, a prediction that is shared by other SLM field commanders in contact with various U.S. officials in the region. Abdelshafi's suspicion that the UN/AU deliberately sabotaged the CHD meeting or at a minimum, did not support it, has seriously undermined his already low opinion of UN/AU leadership. These changes have confused the Kampala-based rebels as to whether or not the UN/AU listens to U.S. advice and/or understands the underlying dynamics of the rebel movements. The leaders of several faction indicate that they view the USG as the guarantor of an eventual peace agreement and consider a U.S. role in the process as vital.

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